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C O R R E C T E D C O P Y - ADDING CARACAS AS INFO ADDSSEE

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TAGS: PHUM LO VE EUN

SUBJECT: SLOVAKIA: STICKING WITH THE EU ON VENEZUELA

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Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Lawrence R. Silverman for Reason
s 1.4 b and d

¶1. (C) Summary. Slovakia will follow the EU line on Venezuela, but will not speak out on a national basis against President Chavez's attempts to expand his powers and restrict those of media, civil society and elected officials. MFA officials indicated that the GOS would be willing to support a mild statement of concern put forth by the UK for EU consideration. Prominent Slovak NGOs that work on international democracy and human rights issues are not prepared to take an activist stance on Venezuela at this time.

¶2. (C) PolEcon chief delivered ref b demarche to Dusan Kristofik, chief of the MFA Americas Department. Although Kristofik said the GOS shares U.S. concerns about many of President Chavez's proposed constitutional amendments, he outlined several reasons why the GOS would not be willing to express publicly these concerns -- at least not on a national basis. Kristofik described deliberations within the EU on Venezuela as difficult. Some members prefer silent diplomacy, while others seek, at a minimum, an EU statement of support for democracy in Venezuela. The general consensus within the EU that the referendum will be a victory for Chavez further saps the EU's will to speak out. Kristofik noted with some chagrin that the next opportunity for the EU to discuss Venezuela would be during the December 6 COLAT, four days after the Venezuelan referendum. In the meantime, according to Kristofik, the Slovaks were willing to support the draft statement the UK had circulated a statement in support of democracy in Venezuela for EU members' consideration. When pressed on the possibility of a national statement, Kristofik demurred. Venezuela is not an important issue for Slovakia, and, in any event, the GOS needed to "lay low" during its campaign for a seat on the Human Rights Council. Noting the inherent irony of this stance, Kristofik assured PolEcon Chief that, once elected, Slovakia would be able to adopt more vocal positions in support of human rights.

¶3. (C) Slovak NGOs that work on democracy and human rights issues in Cuba are closely following events in Venezuela, but do not see it as feasible to expand their activities there. Martin Pasiak, Cuba Program Officer at the Pontis Foundation, told Poloff that Pontis did not have the capacity to extend its programs within the Western Hemisphere, and did not see any viable international funding sources available to develop a consistent program in Venezuela. Eliska Slavikova, Director of Programs (including Cuba and Kosovo) at People in Peril (PiP), told Poloff recently that Venezuela - though a major geopolitical concern because of its reckless international energy policy - does not pose the same concerns

on the domestic front that Cuba does. PiP is struggling to retain funding for its Cuba programs and would have difficulty expanding its reach to include advocacy on Venezuela.

VALLEE